



CONNECTICUT
STATE COUNCIL

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
AFL-CIO, CLC

Main Office:
77 Huyshope Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106
860.251.6091
Fax: 860.548.1935

77 Bedford Street
4th Floor
Stamford, CT 06901
203.602.6615
Fax: 203.964.0428

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Statement by Paul Filson, Director of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Connecticut State Council regarding **Proposed House Bill No. 6693 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A STATE HEALTH CARE PLAN.**— before the Public Health Committee

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs, Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee - I appreciate the opportunity to be here before you today. My name is Paul Filson and I am Director of the Service Employees International Union's Connecticut State Council. The State Council represents over 55,000 active members in Connecticut. SEIU is Connecticut's largest union. We represent health care workers, building service workers, state/municipal employees and community college professors and staff. SEIU is America's largest health care union representing nearly 1 million health care workers.

SEIU, both nationally and here in Connecticut, has made changing our broken and dysfunctional health care system its number 1 policy priority for 2007. The inequities and the inefficiencies of the current system demand attention. Piecemeal and incremental approaches are not acceptable because we know the results of those approaches – they do not work.

Most of our union members receive quality health insurance through their collective bargaining agreements, but it comes at a cost. We must often choose between decent raises in salary or maintenance of benefits. Our contracts are sometimes unsettled for long periods of time because our employers demand we pay higher and higher percentages of the escalating health insurance costs. When you see union members on strike in Connecticut it is usually because health care benefits are being taken away or employer demands for cost shifting..

Perhaps 10% of our members, over 5000, either do not have insurance or can not afford to buy family coverage. Those members drive our children in school buses, or provide care for the elderly or the disabled. Some members clean office buildings or teach courses as adjunct professors. Is it any wonder that school districts have trouble hiring quality drivers or that job turnover rates

in some group homes is well over 100% per year? None of our members who drive school buses or work as monitors on those buses has affordable employer provided health insurance. Recently we interviewed a school bus driver who decided to buy health insurance through his company, Laidlaw. He was not sure what it would cost. His first paycheck was short \$453 because that is how much his family health insurance was per week -- \$453 per week or \$1800 per month. Needless to say, he dropped coverage immediately and is now using emergency rooms again.

SEIU is demanding a bold and comprehensive approach to fixing our healthcare system in Connecticut. We know that if there was political will and political backbone the legislature would pass dramatic reforms. The following principles help form the guideline for SEIU's recommendations for reform:

1. The current employer-based health care system is not the foundation for 21st century health care reform – given the competitive challenges of a global economy.
2. A universal health care system must ensure a choice of doctors and health care plans without gaps in coverage or access, and the delivery system must meet the needs of at-risk populations.
3. A universal health care system must include a core of health care benefits similar to one that is available to federal employees.
4. Preventative care must be part of any basic plan.
5. Any plan for health care reform must control costs by providing care that is cost efficient and medically effective.
6. The health care system must be transparent and accountable to the public.
7. Employers, individuals and government must share responsibility for financing the system.

Our current system is bureaucratic. Our current system rations health care. Our current system makes hundreds of thousands of people wait for long periods of time. Our current system concentrates on cure rather than prevention. Our current system limits choice. What more evidence is needed that we must act now to change? Ultimately, a system that looks a lot like Medicare may be the only solution.

Thank you for holding these hearings. A real solution will require creativity, negotiations and choices, but we know that inaction is not an option. Other states are exploring universal health care options. Let's take the best ideas and make them better.